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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER  
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Annan's Visit, Syria/Lebanon,  
Syria/Egypt, Iraq (9/1-4)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers led with reports of the visit to Damascus by UN SecGen Kofi Annan and his meeting with President Asad, Vice President Shar'a, Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem, and Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Faysal al-Miqdad. Talks focused on the need to consolidate the Lebanese cease-fire, enforcement of an Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territories, lifting of the Israeli siege on Lebanon, and bringing about a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Papers reported Annan's press statement at Damascus airport in which he described his talks with President Asad as "fruitful and constructive".

On Syrian-Lebanese relations, papers reported that President Asad gave directions to rebuild three Lebanese towns, Qana, Sidqein and al-Qulila in a step to support the Lebanese people's steadfastness. The Lebanese National News Agency said that Speaker of the Lebanese parliament Berri and Lebanese PM al-Saniara were informed about the Syrian decision. Papers also reported that Dr. Mahmud al-Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly, called on members of the Assembly to stage a sit-in at the Assembly's headquarters on Tuesday, 5 September, in solidarity with the sit-in that the Lebanese Parliament is staging to protest the Israeli siege on Lebanon.

On Syrian-Egyptian relations, papers reported that President Mubarak underscored the importance of maintaining Syrian-Egyptian relations. "Syria is a sisterly country. Syria and Egypt cannot do without each other," Middle East News Agency (MENA) quoted President Mubarak as saying during a meeting with army generals. End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews with UN SecGen Annan the situation in Lebanon; the Israeli withdrawal and lifting of the Israeli sea and air siege of Lebanon, which violates UNSC Resolution 1701; and the opportunity of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Annan: The international community looks for Syria's important role... It is time to revive the peace process on the basis of UN resolutions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"Syria rebuilds what Israel has demolished in Lebanon. President Asad gives directions to rebuild three Lebanese towns: Qana, Sidiqin and al-Qalila" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/4)

"President Mubarak: Syria and Egypt can't do without each other. Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Meqdad: My visit to Cairo is for consultation and coordination between the two countries" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/4)

"Lebanese MPs stage an open-ended sit-in. Nabih Beri, Chairman of the Lebanese Parliament: The Israeli siege on Lebanon is an act of war, in violation of UNSC Resolution 1701" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/3)

"Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament talks about breaking Israeli siege on Lebanon by sending Arab ships and flights to Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/4)

"Minister of Information Mohsen Bilal confers with members of the Peace Cycle Campaigners. In an interview with Al-Akhbar daily, Bilal: Annan has heard Syria's viewpoint that Israel's continuing occupation of the Arab territories is the main cause of the problem" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/3)

"Information Minister Bilal meets a delegation of citizens of occupied Golan: Syria is determined to restore her occupied territories" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"Three Palestinians martyred, 8 wounded, and 6 homes destroyed by continuing Israeli terrorism in the Gaza Strip" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/3)

"The international community continues to ignore cluster bombs that threaten Lebanese civilians. The Olmert government is split by fiasco of the war against Lebanon. The Lebanese Parliament stages a sit-in today. Former Lebanese PM Al-Hoss criticizes al-Saniora for not condemning the US participation in the war against Lebanon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"EU Foreign Ministers call for reviving the peace process on basis of return to 1967 borders" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"10 Palestinians wounded in Bel'in. The Stockholm donors conference: More than \$500 million has been allocated to

Palestinians, that will reach Palestinians directly apart from the Palestinian government" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"FM Mouallem holds talks with UN SecGen about the situation in the region in the wake of UNSC Resolution 1701, and about the UN role in building peace and lifting Israeli siege on Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/2)

"Israel responds to Annan's demands: Our weapons are legal; No pullout from Lebanon except on our conditions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/2)

"The Pentagon warns against a civil war in Iraq and US President George Bush dismisses this possibility" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/3)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"It is Time to Go Back to Damascus"  
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Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, chief editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/3): "When the time to talk peace comes, the road will always lead to Damascus...."

"Those who have tried to isolate Syria with their barriers have undoubtedly discovered, albeit late, that their barriers prevented them from seeing things correctly and deprived them of an opportunity to learn the facts without distortion...."

"Many in the world have now started to talk about peace in light of the failure of wars, pressures, and threats.... In the past few years, Syria has come under heavy pressure in the form of a vicious war against Syria's principles and adherence to dignity and right.... But Syria has succeeded in overcoming all pressure and has achieved political victories through the credibility of its positions and the proven soundness of its views about regional developments.... All attempts to isolate Syria have failed miserably.... The UN secretary general described Syria as an 'important regional power'...."

"Israel is the main cause of problems in the region.... Any peace effort must force Israel to implement UN resolutions and accept the land-for-peace principle.... If Syria opens the doors wide for any proposal leading to an international commitment to the peace plan, it knows very well that this is not the only way to regain its rights. The demand and quest for peace proceed from the understanding that this is the best solution, but it will not be the only solution.... If the American policy has led to disasters in the region, then listening to Syria helps everyone avoid these disasters, because listening to Damascus means listening to wisdom and peace."

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#### "Accusations and Siege"

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Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/3): "In his latest speech, President Bush, who feels endangered as the election draws near and his popularity drops to unprecedented lows, talked about defeat. For the first time the vocabulary of victory and the show expressions were absent. This reflects his anxiety and his true inside feeling of failure and defeat...."

"Through its mistaken policies, erroneous notions, and Zionist ideological extremism, the Bush administration has undoubtedly harmed the United States and its interests. Its loss in the forthcoming Congressional election might be the result of its foolish policy. Perhaps this loss will be the biggest service the US Administration renders to the American people, who will definitely reject the idea of ideological struggle and support

the principle of dialogue among cultures and civilizations."

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#### "Living in a Great Illusion"

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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (9/3): "In the past two years it was clear that some Western countries, specifically the USA and France, were publicly working to isolate Syria through attempts to distort its role. They obtained UN resolutions for that purpose and they delegated to Israel the greatest part of the job. And, regrettably, some Arab voices quickly lined up behind this Western-Israeli campaign. These Arab voices went too far in their fantasies and they promoted the idea that Syria's role was coming to an end. Naturally, the Lebanese bigmouths were at the head of those discordant Arab voices."

"But the advocates of Syria's isolation soon found out that they were living inside a big illusion. The number of visitors to Syria by presidents, heads of governments, ministers, and official and popular delegations is ever increasing, and so is the number of those who are convinced that it is impossible to bypass Syria. Last week, for example, Damascus was the center of meetings, talks, contacts and visits, culminating in the visits of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan...."

"Syria has not been and cannot be isolated. People must return to Syria in order to address the issues of the region because Syria's role is pivotal, its positions are firm and its defense of right and international legitimacy is principled. The time when Israel dominated the affairs and capabilities of the Arab region is over, or is almost over. New facts have emerged on the ground - facts that have led to radical changes, entrenching the policy of Arab resistance and opposition to all forms of Israeli aggression. These are facts to which Israelis came very close after their latest war against Lebanon and about which many Americans, although from outside the administration, have spoken. These are facts to which the French have referred clearly and of which the hesitant or 'neutral' Arabs, who were overwhelmed by the 'extraordinary' Israeli power, have become convinced...."

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"Syria and Its Constructive Role"  
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Samir al-Shibani, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (9/2): "No one disagrees that Syria's approach to UN principles and resolutions over the past decades has been sincere and serious. Syria leads the world in its concern about the credibility, effectiveness, and independence of this international organization and the need for it to stay away from any alliance and to reject any attempt to absorb or usurp it to serve this party or that. The international organization asserts and entrenches its role and maintains its fairness and credibility to the extent that it rejects the storms of hegemony and the frost of unilateralism.

...

"Syria's belief in and commitment to international law has never been shaken. In all its positions, Syria often, indeed always, demanded the implementation of all resolutions. Some resolutions are decades old. Had they been implemented and their objectives and clauses translated into action, the international organization would not have needed to pass many new resolutions. It would have saved much effort and ended the suffering of peoples and the tremendous injustice done to them. UN SecGen Kofi Annan's statements after his meeting with President Asad prove that Syria is an important regional player and that the international community is looking to it and hoping

it will play a constructive role at this delicate stage....

"Through its constructive and civilized role, which is consistent with its historical fate, Syria will remain at the head of those who abide by UN resolutions and who care about the prestige and reputation of the international organization."

Corbin